DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 277 IR 051 593

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TITLE	School Libraries and the Learning Society.
INSTITUTION	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	13 Feb 84
NOTE	9p.; Paper presented at the Libraries and Learning Society Project (Dallas, TX, February 13, 1984).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Block Grants; *Educational Improvement; Educational Technology; *Elementary Secondary Education; Illiteracy; Learning Resources Centers; *Library Role; *School Libraries; Textbook Content; Textbook Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	*Libraries and the Learning Society; National Commission on Excellence in Education; National Diffusion Network Programs; *Nation at Risk (A)

ABSTRACT

Libraries will play a key role in establishing a learning society and in halting the decline in education described in "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The block grant program has already aided the advancement of library and education programs, especially in the areas of media material and textbooks. Although research statistics provide only limited data to this effect, media programs do, in fact, contribute to excellence in education. Indeed, school libraries can contribute to improving the educational process in several ways. Drawing on the resources of the National Diffusion Network Program, librarians can help to ensure that students learn good study skills. Librarians should establish literacy programs when necessary, and use their expertise to evaluate school textbooks. Libraries should use computers and other technologically advanced resources both for routine housekeeping chores in the school library and to enhance their services to students and teachers. (KM)

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School Libraries and the Learning Society

by
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Libraries and the Learning Society Project
School Library Seminar
Dallas Independent School District
Dallas, Texas

February 13, 1984

IR051593

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Good evening.

I bring all of you sincere greetings from Education Secretary T.H. Bell, and on behalf of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, I welcome you to the school library seminar for the "Libraries and the Learning Society" project. A busy agenda faces you, both this evening and tomorrow, so I will keep my remarks brief.

As you know, the theme for this seminar is taken from A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The findings by the Commission on the state of education within our nation were shocking to many people. The report described a decline in our schools of which many were only vaguely aware but the extent or severity of which few had fully realized.

Documented in print for all to see, after more than a year of extensive and in-depth study by the Commission, the report has provided an impetus for a renewal of the educative process by the states.

We have the ability to make our schools the outstanding examples of preparation and education for our young people that they should be. As the report states the:

> The essential raw materials needed to reform our educational system are waiting to be mobilized through effective leadership:....These raw materials, combined with the unparalleled array of educational organizations in America, offer us the possibility to create a Learning Society, in which public, private, and parochial schools; colleges and universities; vocational and technical schools and institutes; libraries; science centers, museums, and other cultural institutions; and corporate training and retraining programs offer opportunities and choices for all to learn throughout life.

As we focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society, libraries have a key role to play. My own appreciation of the importance of good

libraries comes from my background as a student, college professor, and a researcher for our national legislative branch, the U.S. Congress. It would be impossible for those in the academic world--teachers, scholars and students--to function, let alone make progress, without good libraries, and those essential elements of a good library-- dedicated librarians and effective library services.

As a public administrator, I have been pleased that the library, technology, research, and statistics programs my office administers have contributed considerably to the advancement of library and education programs. Aid to school libraries is now a part of block grant funding. Under the block grant program, library programs have not disappeared. In fact, in a report from 24 states on their use of block grant funds by local education associations, the states indicate that the largest amounts expended under Subchapter B--Education Improvement and Support—is in the Library/Media Materials/Textbook category. Among the states reporting, 45% (over 56 million dollars) has been spent in this area.

One excellent example of the use of block grant funds is that found in Staples, Minnesota public schools. This school system bought micro-computers for media center administration in order to free librarians from tedious paperwork and record keeping. This allows the librarians to perform in a capacity that really counts—working directly with students.

They have replaced the card catalogs in the schools with a microcomputer data base that will give author, title, subject, and bibliographic searches in the school library collection in minutes. The

data bases are used to check out materials, find overdue books, and inventory the materials collections--all with the flick of a light pen.

They are starting with a few of their schools in this program but will eventually include all public schools in Staples.

I would like to spend a few minutes with you and share some of my thoughts on "How School Library Media Centers Contribute To Academic Excellence." I am aware that the studies of the effects of school library media programs on teaching and learning provide only limited data relating library programs to student achievement. I believe, however, that school library media services do contribute to academic excellence and I assume you share that opinion. It amazes me that this kind of evidence is demanded of school libraries. We assume that there is no question that college and university libraries contribute to educational excellence in postsecondary institutions. Why are the demands different for our elementary and secondary schools?

In any case, as the Department of Education official responsible for research and statistics, I have a special interest in using research findings to provide solutions to educational problems. I encourage the school library community to continue to apply research methods to the school library field seeking to link school library media programs and services to student achievement. Most of this audience is only too aware of the need to use research data to justify the need for programs and services and to provide the baseline data so badly needed in these times of austerity and reduced budgets.

Library programs in schools have a unique and vital role in education. That role is to help students learn to find, evaluate, and

use information, and develop the ability to judge the quality of what they read, listen to, or view. Unless elementary and secondary school students have these competencies, they are disadvantaged throughout their lives with respect to their further education, jobs, family life, civic responsibilities, and even effective and creative use of leisure time.

The findings of A Nation at Risk have relevance for school librarians and I note with pleasure the useful responses to the Commission Report from organizations like the American Association of School Librarians and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. There are, however, several matters associated with the Commission Report which are particularly significant to school librarians as areas where your special expertise can be very helpful to teachers and other school personnel. They have to do with several aspects of the educational process as defined in the Commission Report: content, expectations, and time.

The first is that schools are not doing enough to help students develop the study skills that are required to use efficiently the time spent on school work. I commend the Dallas schools for developing and using learner standards for all areas of the curriculum and library skills. These standards, I am informed, include development of information skills from kindergarten to the twelfth grade level. I hope school librarians will make special efforts to work with teachers to assure that the teaching of study skills is planned and systematic; that students learn to synthesize and interpret diverse kinds of information; learn to consider and evaluate alternatives; learn to analyze, compare, and draw inferences.

As Dallas and other school districts improve study skills programs, school librarians and teachers need to draw on the resources of our National Diffusion Network Program, a nationwide system established to help educators acquire the materials and technical assistance they need to incorporate improved practices into their programs. Perhaps it would be possible to develop and evaluate the best study skills projects to the point that a claim of effectiveness could be established through the U.S. Education Department's Joint Dissemination Review Panel. If this occurs, exemplary study skills projects could be transferred to other school districts and consequently, elementary and secondary school students would be less likely to complete high school and enter college without disciplined and systematic study habits.

The next point is pertinent to school libraries and perhaps even more so to public libraries -- that is, establishing a literate society. Illiteracy is a major problem among portions of the adult population and unfortunately among large segments of our youth population where young people have not learned to read and write and have drifted away from formal schooling. You may know that more than 1/4 of all students entering high school do not graduate. The situation is worse in some states than in others.

Frank E. Armbruster of the Hudson Institute in his work Our Children's Crippled Future: How American Education Has Failed comments as follows on the learning process:

> Some children have always had more trouble learning than others. Some are slow starters, but if the material is not too difficult, most children apparently suddenly find themselves reading, as though a light had gone on. Promoting a child so that he must deal with more difficult

> material when that light has just begun to flicker may be counter-productive. If he has not mastered the basics first, he can become frustrated and discouraged.....These are the hardest students to motivate and it is among them that we usually find the most dropouts.

Reading can be the key to future success in school. Armbruster further states:

> On the other hand, once a pupil really can read well, he is more likely to take off in later grades to the limit of his competence.

I hope you can address this point in your deliberations. School libraries can provide great benefits to individuals and to society with literacy programs where they are needed. Many functionally illiterate young adults come from homes where they may not have been read to as young children or become familiar with books, magazines, or even engage in much literate conversation. These young people are often painfully conscious of their problems though they may attempt to hide their feelings. They have a great need to experience some success in school. I know that many of you have thought carefully about this problem and have good suggestions for other schools.

My next point relates to the Commission findings regarding subject matter content. The Commission Report cites a study by the Education Products Information Exchange which found that subject-matter textbooks are not sufficiently challenging. I believe that teachers and school administrators are not sufficiently aware of the school librarian's expertise in the evaluation of materials and of the contribution that librarians can make to the evaluation of textbooks, particular to the analysis of reading lists and bibliographies in the textbooks being considered.

My last point concerns educational technology. As you examine the direction that school libraries must take to create and maintain a learning society, I know you will not forget the dramatic changes being brought about by the computer and other technologies. I know that computers, in particular, are being used in the administrative, management, and instructional functions of schools generally, and I hope these technologies offer great assistance for being utilized for the routine housekeeping chores of the school library as well as for direct library services to students and teachers.

This seminar is the fourth of five seminars being held to hear the views of the library community. In the last century, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

> Consider what you have even in the smallest chosen library. A company of the wisest and wittiest men and women that could be picked out of all civil countries, in a thousand years, have set in best order the results of their learning and wisdom.

You face the challenge of identifying what role libraries should play in a learning society. Many children in this nation may never use a public library or an academic library. But most of our children attend schools. The schools they attend should have fine libraries and library programs. Tomorrow should be a day of lively discussion. I look forward to hearing your recommendations.